

# OXFORD

## MAGAZINE

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No. 461 Second Week Hilary Term 2024

The uses and purposes of libraries and books are changing. Now that so much is online it is perhaps inevitable that unexpected glitches emerge, alongside challenging questions about traditional practices. The newly revamped Radcliffe Science Library is full of students but they are not reading books, just using lap tops. As part of its role as a gathering place the RSL now provides board games in its “well-being” break-out rooms: a sign of changing times and needs. Another new aspect of library use arises from restrictions to online access to legal deposit material; this is available only on-site in the physical library rather than in departments or for home-working. Meanwhile colleges have put considerable resources into building their own new libraries and, incidentally, in duplicating acquisitions.

Up until relatively recently the Bodleian, as a legal deposit library, received hard copies of all books published in the UK and maintained a respectable coverage of foreign imprints as well as journal runs. The now vast accumulated and still enlarging store of 12 million books is housed 25 miles away in Swindon, with next-day deliveries by van transport after online ordering. But now we are rapidly reaching the point at which all modern publications are becoming available online – and increasingly online-only, as well as open access among academic and scientific publications. Gaps in the Oxford library’s collections still need to be filled by interlibrary loans and increasingly we are dependent on facilities provided by the British Library.

The risks attached to centralisation of facilities have recently become glaringly real; a cyber-attack in late October – supposedly demanding £600,000 – made the British Library’s 30 million catalogue records (and its

### THE VALUE OF LIBRARIES

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600,000 EThOS listings of UK doctoral dissertations) unavailable and therefore its holdings inaccessible, alongside public lending rights payments to authors. The government ruled out ransom payment and only now – over the next few months – are records being gradually restored. Costs entailed are said to be in the region of £7 million. Many people’s work has been on hold and deadlines have been missed. Personal in-

formation on readers and BL employees has apparently been exploited by the hackers. Due to our dependence on the BL Bodleian readers have had their academic work similarly affected.

Clearly we are not going to go back to print-only publishing and do not need to. But what then is the point of the Swindon storage facility when the great majority of its contents is online?

It happens that the Ministry of Justice is currently planning to destroy its holding of 100 million historical wills (dating from 150 years ago) in order to save £4.5m recurrent storage costs on the grounds that it is – at considerable expense – digitizing them all. Historians are outraged and it seems likely that they might prevail in scotching the policy. The historian argues that the physical volume in itself can contain historical information, and might later have value that we cannot yet anticipate. Digitization introduces errors and cloud data is open to system failure, redundancy due to changing reading tools, as well as cyber-attack and great cost in energy consumption contributing to climate change.

It is particularly relevant at this moment to ask why the Swindon book depository is important because of the current consultations on widening borrowing rights in the Bodleian (see Reminders). From its very foundation, the

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*...and much more*

RSL has allowed “privileged borrowing” for staff members. Many departmental and specialist libraries in the University allow borrowing, as do colleges. Cambridge has long allowed students to borrow selectively from its own legal deposit library – lost books are replaced if necessary by Xerox copies. This suggests that Oxford has little to fear in widening lending and the demand could be small and likely to shrink.

Nonetheless, the trends may well continue. Students may value books less and less; physical textbooks may

ultimately disappear (availability of multiple lending copies of standard texts are reducing in Oxford libraries). Students may devalue libraries as resources for the serendipitous exploration of realms of knowledge beyond the needs of the weekly essay or the next exam. The physical books stored in Swindon may be used less and less and we may even reach the point of questioning the continued existence of that treasure house.

B.B., T.J.H.

## How to initiate Congregation actions

### *How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation*

It is open to any 20 or more members of Congregation to propose a resolution or topic for discussion at a meeting of Congregation; requests must be made in writing to the Registrar not later than noon on the 22nd day before the relevant meeting. Any 2 or more members of Congregation can submit an amendment to, or announce an intention to vote against, a resolution or a legislative proposal (*i.e.* a proposal to amend the statutes). Notice must be given to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 8th day before the meeting.

### *Questions and replies*

Any 2 or more members of Congregation may ask a question in Congregation about any matter concerning the policy or the administration of the University. Requests must be submitted to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 18th day before the Congregation meeting at which it is to be asked. The question and the reply (drafted by Council) will be published in *Gazette* in the week prior to the relevant meeting. The answer is also formally read out at the meeting. Supplementary questions are allowed.

### *Postal votes*

Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present (“on the floor”) at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6th day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

### *Flysheets*

To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

Regulations governing the conduct of business in Congregation can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/529-122.shtml>

Items placed on the agenda for Congregation are published in the *Gazette*.

The Congregation website is at: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation).

Advice on Congregation procedures is available from the Council Secretariat on request (email: [congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk)).



# Reminders



*The following Notice has been circulated by the Curators of the University Libraries and the Committee on Library Provision and Strategy - eds*

## **Review of the lending status of categories of material held in the Collections Storage Facility**

### *a) Summary*

Following approval from the Curators of the University Libraries to conduct a review of the lending status of categories of material held in the Collections Storage Facility (CSF), it is planned to begin with a 'listening exercise' to investigate the thoughts, opinions and feelings of students, academics, researchers and external readers about potential changes. There is no predetermined or expected outcome to the review, except that particular categories of special or vulnerable material will certainly remain unavailable for loan.

This investigation will include [updated 12/01/24]:

- One-to-one interviews with academics who have a keen interest in this topic (MT23-Wk 1 HT24)
- Focus groups for academics, grouped by Division (MT23-HT24)
- Surveys to: all taught students, all research students, all academic staff and researchers, external Bodleian card holders (HT24)
- Proposed -Town hall event TT24

Survey questions will be informed by the results of interviews and focus groups. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, a proposal will be formulated for formal consultation in Michaelmas Term 2024 (and Hilary Term 2025 if appropriate). Subject to approval by the Curators of the University Libraries, new arrangements or a confirmation of no change will be formally implemented in January 2025 or Michaelmas Term 2025.

### *b) Action required*

The Committee is asked to:

- endorse the planned programme of investigation
- nominate members (and non-members) who wish to be interviewed
- circulate this paper to members of the Faculty for their information to
  - reduce misunderstandings about the plan and
  - encourage colleagues to engage with the investigation when it is announced in due course.

### *c) Background*

A number of significant changes have taken place over the last two decades both in the publishing and scholarly communications landscape and in the physical configuration of the Bodleian Libraries and the storage of closed-access books. The recent implementation of Alma has allowed refreshed and more consistent policies to be adopted. Feedback in successive reader surveys has consistently asked for increased lending of books. In this context, it seems appropriate to review the historic lending arrangements under which, broadly speaking, legal deposit and purchased material 'in the Bodleian Library' is not available for loan and purchased material (unique or otherwise) in 21 other libraries is available for loan. There are exceptions in both directions including: various libraries operate historic exceptions allowing 'privileged borrowing' from non-lending collections; the 'lending libraries' restrict particular categories, for example reference material and rare books; legal deposit items on the open shelves in the lending libraries may be made available for loan.

There are about 12 million physical items in the collections of the Bodleian Libraries and about 4 million of these are available for loan (the vast majority but not all being on the open shelves in the 'lending libraries'). In many instances, one or more lending copies duplicate one or more non-lending copies, largely through historical accident, but budgets are decreasingly able to provide for multiple copies. A further dimension of overlap exists between physical and electronic copies of the same item where the latter may be deemed to be always borrowable and the former may be randomly borrowable or not. We should ponder the question: if we have an electronic copy of a book, do we not need to lend the printed copy (on the grounds that the electronic copy acts as the lending copy) or can we freely lend the printed copy (on the grounds that the electronic copy remains available to consultation in a reading room, in particular for external readers)?

These historical practices and changed circumstances have in effect produced a fairly random assignment of lending and non-lending status with dramatic differences in the mix for different subjects. We seek to elicit the views of readers about:

- a) the relative usefulness of being able to borrow material against confining it to in-library consultation,
- b) any specific concerns and potential refinements that might address those concerns, e.g. range of publication date limits.

Alongside this it will be useful to refresh the data on the number of items called more than very infrequently from the CSF. Previously such competition appeared to be at a very low level suggesting that in practice readers would very rarely have to wait for returns.

There is a further practical consideration in that any forward-looking or retrospective application needs to be done via broad categories which can be applied by algo-

rhythms applied to specific fields in the catalogue. It would not of course be feasible for staff to have to conduct a book-by-book review in any large numbers. Previous discussions have also identified the need to provide for increased levels of repair if more books go out on loan.

#### *d) Public Sector equality duty*

As a public body, the University has an active duty to consider the impact on equality in all decision making. It is considered that the outcome of this investigation and consultation will have an impact on equality as, from consultations with the Bodleian Disability Committee, lending is acknowledged as improving various aspects of accessibility for disabled students and researchers.

#### *e) Further information*

Further information may be obtained from Associate Director for Academic Library Services, Bodleian Libraries, Antony Brewerton, [antony.brewerton@bodleian.ox.ac.uk](mailto:antony.brewerton@bodleian.ox.ac.uk) tel: (2)77167

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*The following areas of possible misunderstanding have emerged during initial consultations – eds*

- The proposal is about lending everything – this is not correct:
  - It is only books that are stored in the Collections Storage Facility.
  - Specifically, items that are reference on the open shelves in the Old Library and Radcliffe Camera are out of scope.
  - All Special Collections items, wherever they are stored, are out of scope.
- Books that are borrowed will be unavailable for months – this is not correct, there is no specific proposal about loan period. The standard loan periods currently in use by the Bodleian Libraries are 2 days, 7 days or 28 days.
- Everything at the CSF is currently available immediately – this is not correct. The books stored at the CSF are currently ‘loaned’ to an individual for 7 days when they request it to a reading room, making it unavailable to other readers until the end of that loan period and after it has been returned to the CSF. In practice, so few of the items are needed by more than one person at the same time that to an individual researcher it feels like everything is always immediately available.
- The law does not allow it – this is not correct. There is nothing in the Legal Deposit legislation that prevents loan of physical items. Cambridge University Library and Trinity College Dublin (two of the six Legal Deposit libraries) already lend this material.

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# Tell it like it is – climate realism needs to go mainstream, beginning in universities

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RUPERT READ

In 2023 everything changed. It has been confirmed as the [hottest year](#) on record, the consequences of which have been felt worldwide for perhaps the first time.

I’ve long been warning that the brutal reality is that the 1.5 degree C of overheat global maximum target is dead in the water but, according to the [Met Office](#), this year it will likely be confirmed. Just let that sit for a minute; the target conceived to avoid the worst impacts of global temperature rise and minimise the risks – and costs – of reaching even higher warming levels is going to be broken. Already. Not in 10 or 20 years but, in practice, right now. While we went beyond the crossroads some time ago, I do wonder if in years to come, when we look back on 2024, we see it as the year when there was finally a u-turn in the battle to save our planet. Is this the year when all the warnings finally hit the target and we began to go all out to save ourselves?

For me, at least, last year was already the beginning of

that. In September, I agreed voluntary severance with the University of East Anglia (UEA) after 26 years. Increasingly, for the last 16 years of that time I had been taking sabbaticals, working part-time and taking unpaid leave in order to work as a climate activist. While it was definitely something, it never felt quite enough.

As I mentioned in a previous article (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 447, 8th Week, MT 2022):

*“The next big step forward in climate action must bring the public with us. We need together to step beyond the lures of polarisation, roll our sleeves up, and get down to business changing the operating system: so that it no longer resembles a conveyor belt to hell.”*

In that year, having said farewell to Extinction Rebellion, that’s what I worked on. The [Climate Majority Project](#), of which I am co-director, officially launched in 2023

and I gave up my academic role to join others to undertake the shared project of saving the world. The central idea of the Climate Majority Project is that everyone, be they a lawyer, a teacher, a creative, a food-grower, a parent, a child, or whatever, has a real and potentially unique role to play, doing what they do, together with others, in addressing the crisis of our times. You don't need to break the law; you don't need to protest or become an 'activist'. But you do need to actively reflect on what *your* potential superpower is. That means you probably need to reassess what you are doing with your life. You can't take for granted that the best way to carry on or up the ante on caring for the future is to carry on doing what you are doing.

I'll look back on my academic life with much affection, but also with some anger, and most definitely with anguish. While UEA was in [serious trouble](#), the fundamental cause of my departure, is that I've gradually come to see academia as constitutively ill-suited to contributing seriously to the epochal question of our time: our wilful destruction of our collective life-support system.

Perhaps you feel the same? Even now, with everything that's happened, there are many in academia, even some who work on the frontline of the climate crisis, *still* trying not to frighten the horses. *Still* practicing some degree of scientific reticence. *Still* not focussing on the way, when we talk about climate, we need to be talking about adaptation more than merely mitigation. *Still* not saying publicly what they whisper over a beer or to a therapist or friend privately, about where they think we are really at.

I spoke at the Oxford Net Zero conference four years ago. While [my talk](#) went down well, a question from a don asking why I was offering any criticisms whatsoever of scientists as opposed to only criticising deniers etc. also got a good round of applause. I had to explain that when scientists fail to practice the precautionary principle, or when they make it sound as if we can still stay below 1.5, they do a public disservice. Four years later, sadly, making my point would be much easier, and probably the question wouldn't even be asked. For the warnings that I and others have been sounding for the last several years about how the situation is more desperate than the IPCC has made it sound have, tragically, been vindicated by the awful on-going off-the-charts spike in world temperatures, this last 12 months.

Maybe you're considering consciously quitting? Perhaps you feel, like me, you have more to give outside of the limits of academia? If you can, I would urge you to; but those who remain have a strong and important responsibility to tell their *students* (and funders) the truth.

As the editorial in the recent climate-focussed issue of this magazine suggests (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 459, 8th Week, MT 2023), while the Vice-Chancellor is planning to make teaching on dangerous human-triggered climate change available to interested undergraduates, it's nowhere near enough. In the face of blistering record-breaking temperatures, it's almost laughable, to just make such teaching 'available'. Oxford students are in a privileged position and they need to be emboldened to use that to the advantage of the planet. Climate and ecology should now be a spine running through the teaching of every single subject (except Maths).

Then of course there is research. Here too, every academic who remains ought to be thinking about how to make their research relevant to the more-than-emergence that faces us. And vice versa. In, as I shall explain, a very

broad sense.

Key here of course are the emerging and growing agendas/concepts of engagement and impact. On balance, I think the impact agenda is probably been a good thing. It was certainly kind to me. I was able to turn [the work I do beyond the ivory tower](#) into benefit for my department and university (and, hopefully, for the world). But – and it's a big “but” – the crude mode of its implementation has been profoundly suboptimal. It assumes economic gain to be a central goal of enquiry and the measure of whether society is getting value for its money.

Since those engaged in research know that the criterion of economic gain completely misses their discoveries' true value as contributions to knowledge (let alone to wisdom), a sense of alienation results. We are not only being valued merely as tools, we are being asked to contribute to a project misdirected towards an end that has no real value in itself – an end that may, indeed, be destructive of the well-being of all parties to the transaction, given the causal connection between economic growth-ism and climate breakdown.

The research community needs to resituate itself. It should be a contributor to society by virtue of its adherence to authentic (though waning) scholarly values. Contributions to freedom, to clarity of thought, to virtue, to beauty are also kinds of impact. A proper historical view would remind us of the importance of such things for flourishing civilisations. Sometimes the most important research will be work revealing how wrong and misguided our values and measures of success are. Such research might, for example, require the society that funds it to change course. To return to the climate example, it may require society to curb its quest for growth and to end its exploitation of natural resources, human workers and research expertise.

That is why it is an abomination that one of the criteria for “successful impact” is increasing GDP. This wholly prejudices the issue and constitutes blunt systemic bias against the rising number of academics who take it as increasingly obvious that post-growth/degrowth is now required, and whose research shows this in detail.

It is, above all, the arts and humanities that are equipped to remind us of the things I am saying in this column. Yet the impact agenda embodies a [simple-minded model of “progress”](#), based on a whiggish idea that technological progress goes hand in hand with social benefit – despite the overwhelming evidence that it does not. That entire way of thinking about science, as a kind of “investment” to promote economic growth and “productivity”, needs to be called out as bogus.

University managers continue to embrace this STEM bias, too. UEA's ills, for instance, are heavily to do with managerialism and [scientism](#), and this will only be entrenched by the fact that the [arts and humanities are suffering the bulk of the cuts](#) – despite having run a surplus for years and subsidised the rest of the university during that time. The “cure” will be *more* of the disease.

I do not want to throw the “impact” baby out with the polluted bathwater of the agenda's implementation. But I hope I've said enough to indicate that a far loftier version of impact is needed. We need the kind of ambition present in the neglected works of [Nicholas Maxwell](#), who urges universities to redesign themselves to be in their essence of service in an age when outdated epistemologies are contributing to an eco-driven collapse of civilisation.

Perhaps those of you remaining in the system can find

the determination to demand this reinvention. In the meantime, I will join others trying to save the world from outside the academy. Don't get me wrong: many of my best friends are academics. But: While there is much about life as an academic that I sometimes miss, I'm glad to have moved on. When the opportunity came to do so, I knew it would be a failure of will not to take it - I can only urge you to at least consider doing the same.

For, in words made famous in *Lord of the Rings*, and very pertinent to us: the hour grows late.

NB. Users of print copies can access the blue links in this article through the online version - eds

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# Free Speech: A Response to Kate O'Regan

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ROGER TEICHMANN

There is much to agree with in Kate O'Regan's lecture the text of which was printed in the latest *Oxford Magazine* ('Debating the Difficult: the human right to receive and impart ideas in the 21st century'). I think she is right, for example, when she says that J.S. Mill's argument in favour of freedom of speech – that it is liable to lead to the prevailing of true beliefs over erroneous ones – applies more evidently to academic research than to 'today's communication ecosystem' as typified by social media. In addition, and as the subtitle of her lecture indicates, O'Regan is aware of the importance of the right, asserted in Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, 'to seek, receive and impart information' (in her words); in this way the Article 'is focused not only on the speaker but also the listener'.

However, the second of these points seems to make problems for O'Regan's rather quietist attitude to the phenomenon of academics or students cancelling or no-platforming people with whose views they disagree. For what that phenomenon can and does often amount to is the attempt to prevent some group, e.g. of students, from arranging an event at which they hope or expect to *seek and receive information*. (For present purposes, the term 'information' has to be read widely, just as it does when talking about what is conveyed by many ordinary academic lectures or – say – by the Vice-Chancellor's Oration.) We are not talking here about the mere expression of an opinion along the lines of 'How sad it is, and how perturbed we are, that X has been invited to speak...' We are talking about practical efforts to prevent some event's taking place. An example might be OUSU's threat to prevent the Oxford Union's having a stall at Freshers' Fair; if, as seems most likely, that threat was made in the light of the Union's having invited Kathleen Stock to come and speak, then OUSU was aiming to violate the very right asserted by Article 19 to which O'Regan draws our attention. Admittedly, those who are merely 'calling for' some cancellation or no-platforming are aiming to get *others* to violate that right, so avoid the charge of directly wronging people in the way that inciting others to murder avoids being murder. But calling for disinvitation aims (on the

face of it) at a rights-violation just as does the disinvitation itself.

O'Regan quotes with approval Amia Srinivasan's statement:

*'Arguably, every instance in which students protest against an invitation and the speaker appears anyway is an instance of things going precisely as they should on a free and intellectually diverse campus.'*

Naturally one wants to know whether Srinivasan also thinks that every instance in which students protest against an invitation and the speaker's invitation is withdrawn is likewise an instance of things going precisely as they should etc. etc. Given her position, she must think so. 'No-platforming and calls for cancelled invitations are first and foremost expressive actions,' she writes, inadvertently assimilating disinvitation and the call for it. And for O'Regan, when students or academics protest against invitations 'they are exercising their right to free speech'. But, as I have said, we need to distinguish the mere expression of a view from a practical attempt to prevent others from hearing certain views.

There have been cases where the authorities themselves disinvite someone, thereby preventing others from hearing that person's views. Thus, Cambridge University famously withdrew an invitation to Jordan Peterson after a photo appeared of him standing next to someone wearing a t-shirt bearing the legend 'I'm a proud Islamaphobe [*sic*]'. Whether or not O'Regan would defend that particular decision, she does think that 'there is no doubt that universities need to take steps to prevent discriminatory and harmful speech.'

But what is meant by calling someone's speech (i.e. what they say) discriminatory? Or harmful? The narrative around *harm* in particular is notoriously ideological, the main symptom of this being the huge inflation of the class of things that get counted as harms.<sup>1</sup> As for 'discriminatory', the primary application of this adjective is to cases where one person (or set of persons) is treated differently from another for reasons that are bad ones given the rationale of the decision process itself. If I am employing



a stunt double for Brad Pitt I don't discriminate against anyone by auditioning only white males; the point and context of that particular decision is what provides the criteria for whether my reasons are good or bad. So what about speech? Well, by means of speech I could enact a discriminatory decision, e.g. if as a judge I said 'You are to go to gaol for 10 years', my reasons relating to the person's skin colour or weight; but apart from such cases it just isn't clear what's meant by calling someone's *utterances* discriminatory. It might just mean that their utterances express views which wrongly denigrate some person or people; but if one says it's obvious that universities should prevent such utterances taking place (on their land? - by their employees? - by their employees' guests?...), then one is saying that it's obvious what counts as denigration and what counts as wrongful here - which itself is far from obvious. And even if those things *were* obvious would it be obvious that universities should prevent such utterances?

The fact is that universities themselves are susceptible to forms of ideological orthodoxy, orthodoxy which gets manifested, all too often, in attempts to impose some and discourage other viewpoints. One such orthodoxy is that of EDI (Equality, Diversity, Inclusivity), but it is not the only one. EDI is an ideology in the sense that a person may reasonably question and/or disagree with its tenets or presuppositions; for example, concepts like '(under) representation' involve theoretical claims which can and should be interrogated rather than presumed true. One major reason for touting the value of free speech within an institution is simply that the tendency or push towards ideological conformity generally represents a lowering of intellectual acumen and curiosity. The result can be views that are plain silly and occasionally toxic. If university authorities were empowered with deciding what views kicking around are 'discriminatory and harmful' and moreover with preventing their expression within the

university, there seems little doubt which views would pass muster and which would be penalised. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 aims to prevent such prevention; if the views someone has expressed (or which someone might express on a given occasion) are lawful, then accusations of their being 'discriminatory and harmful' are liable to fail.

The Act will not be able to put the brakes on other ways in which EDI affects our lives. Positive discrimination in the context of hiring academics or admitting students is unlawful but it would be disingenuous to deny that the EDI mindset encourages it, or indeed that it goes on. It is more or less impossible in practice for an unsuccessful candidate to prove they were discriminated against, given the (no doubt rightly) secretive nature of the decision procedures, and this makes positive discrimination much harder to police than more public matters like cancelled speakers or disciplined employees. But the Act ought to be of some help when it comes to those public matters.

Perhaps it is unfortunate that the legislature should have taken on a task which in an ideal world universities would perform for themselves; but as the caseload of the Free Speech Union indicates, universities continue to fail on this front (possibly on occasion because of misunderstanding the implications of the Equality Act 2010). Kate O'Regan's emphasis on the right to seek, receive and impart information is very welcome. But the implications of that right for our attitude to free speech go further, I think, than she allows.

<sup>1</sup> I have written in an earlier edition of the *Oxford Magazine* about the conceptual inflation suffered by such terms as 'hate', 'harm', 'exclusion' and (alas) 'genocide'; see 'Kathleen Stock at the Oxford Union', *Oxford Magazine* No. 455, 8th Week, TT 2023.

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# Challenging casualisation in universities

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BEN BOLLIG

Regular readers of the *Oxford Magazine* will be well aware of concerns about casualization in the University. In the first week of Hilary Term, Reading Employment Tribunal heard a case brought by two tutors who teach on the Masters in Creative Writing in the Department of Continuing Education. Rebecca Abrams and Alice Jolly, both award-winning authors, have taught for the Department for over fifteen years.

Employed on a series of "contracts for services," as they are known, Abrams and Jolly argued that the University maintained them on what are otherwise called "zero-hours" contracts, in a form of precarious employment. The authors (and their lawyers, Leigh Day LLP), claimed that the nature of their work - including the use of their names and CVs in advertising courses to potential applicants, and their continuous service over many

years - means they should be classed as employees of the University. Both had work removed in 2022, which they argue was a response to their campaigning and trade union activity on this issue, which had been supported by the Society of Authors. The case was heard between 15-17 January 2024 and the tribunal judge is expected to give the verdict within a month. The University has declined to comment on the case while it is in progress.

As Rachel Hall of *The Guardian* wrote last year, the claimants argue that the University has employed them as "gig economy workers in a case which draws on the landmark ruling that gave Uber drivers the right to paid holidays and a pension."<sup>1</sup> Ms Abrams has also been critical of the IT system, Redpot, used to process payments to hourly-paid staff; the tribunal heard that there were numerous errors and omissions in the system. The UCU

report, “Beyond HESA,” has also raised problems with payment as a major issue with how the University pays staff on casual contracts.<sup>2</sup>

The case has ramifications beyond two specific instances of possibly wrongful dismissal. In a statement to the press, Rebecca Abrams said:

*“We are bringing this action on behalf of hundreds of Oxford University tutors who, like us, are employed on legally questionable casual contracts. With nearly 70 per cent of its staff on precarious contracts, Oxford is one of the worst offenders when it comes to the uberisation of higher education teaching. This is bad for teachers and for students. It is inexcusable that Oxford University is failing, as we believe it is, in its fundamental legal obligations to the very people on whom its world-wide reputation for academic excellence relies.”*

Alice Jolly stated,

*“Creative writing courses are entirely dependent on the quality of the writers who teach on them and universities use writers’ CVs to market these courses. But too often universities will only offer zero hours contracts which offer no job security and sometimes pay as little as £25 an hour. Hourly rates do not always include preparation, so the real level of pay may be half of the stated amount. This legal action is not only about Rebecca and my personal circumstances. It is about the future of Higher Education and also the status of writers.”*

Speaking to the OM, Ms Abrams said,

*“on the first day of the hearing, the University conceded that we should have been classed as ‘workers’ rather than self-employed or casual contractors. The University claimed at the hearing there is either no or very limited mutuality of obligation, but in practise OUDCE relies entirely on tutors like myself and Alice doing our teaching as scheduled and could not function if we observed the letter of our current contracts.”*

Ms Abrams added,

*“this is another example of a powerful institution using its strength to silence the people on whom it relies. There are over 1,200 tutors in ContEd employed on casual contracts, exactly like us, many of whom have worked for the department for over ten years. What I do is no different from what a permanent university lecturer does. In reality what we are paid is less than the Oxford living wage. We are dedicated teachers who work extremely hard for the university and our students, as skilled individuals with specialised knowledge and it is fundamentally unfair for the university to employ us in this way.”*

The implications of this case for the University are significant. Many departments depend on hourly-paid teaching to deliver their courses, and there has been widespread reporting – mostly negative – about the university’s reliance on often very lowly paid and insecure work to deliver a variety of courses.<sup>3</sup> While graduate students often welcome – and request – teaching experience to prepare for the job market, the wider practice of relying on short-term and limited-hours, as opposed to permanent, contracts has been questioned by unions, lawyers, and the press.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jan/23/academics-sue-oxford-university-teaching-contracts-gig-economy-lecturers>

<sup>2</sup> [https://oxforducu.files.wordpress.com/2023/11/2023\\_pay\\_and\\_conditions\\_report\\_-\\_draft\\_3-31-oct-final.pdf](https://oxforducu.files.wordpress.com/2023/11/2023_pay_and_conditions_report_-_draft_3-31-oct-final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Emma Irving, “Oxford University’s Other Diversity Crisis,” *The Economist* 1843 Magazine <https://www.economist.com/1843/2023/03/01/oxford-universitys-other-diversity-crisis>



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# To a Dead Raven

If they had known  
That afterwards  
Your wife  
With great rasping sobs  
Would call through the trees  
In the last place she saw you  
Her whole being becoming those primal calls  
Which ricochet from the empty forest

If they had known that your garb  
Normally so brushed and dandy  
Would sit on your corpse like  
Wet leaves, and your face would  
Snug into the corner of this cardboard box  
An ancient knowing  
dying with you inside the dome of that skull  
A knowledge which could find a nook for this brave body  
To survive any brutal or blistering weather  
Could find sustenance in the tilled soil and  
In the leaf litter  
In the heart of an oak.  
Would they?

If they maybe knew the numbers  
That we outweigh your kind  
A thousand-fold  
That you have culture and lineage and homeland  
And family and extended family  
And that the love you bear lasts  
Once united with a partner  
A whole lifetime and that

Behind that flickering eye light  
There are more dawns than we humans  
Have even dreamed of seeing  
And there's a euphony of music we can't hear  
So lambasted are we by our own nullifying sounds  
Black cap, linnet, heron, the whooper swan  
On its way to the tundra.

If they knew that dying on the forest floor  
you would be scooped into the arms of a  
walker, and warmed by the fire  
wrapped in a yellow fleece  
and transported  
20 miles in a car to a rescue centre where  
You would breathe your last breaths  
Under the gaze of someone who  
Deeply cares, would they?  
Would they?

If he knew, is there a chance  
Is there any tiny fleeting chance  
he would lower the stupefying barrel and returning  
to his centrally heated home  
Turn the key for the last time on the gun  
in its metal cupboard, go and make something  
beautiful out of his day?

While out there, somewhere,  
you continued your innocent dance with  
Yolk and brimstone and the helical curl of snail shells  
If they knew, how she calls and she mourns still,  
Would they?

I don't know, but I promise, I promise  
I will try make them listen, I promise, I will tell.

SASHA NORRIS

Sasha Norris holds a DPhil in Zoology and has recently completed an MSt in Creative Writing. She is the founder of Herefordshire Wildlife Rescue.

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# The future of the lone researcher

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G.R.EVANS

The Arts and Humanities Research Council is the newest of the Research Councils, joining the other Research Councils<sup>1</sup> only in 2004.<sup>2</sup> The *Dearing Report* of 1997<sup>3</sup> urged the speedy establishment of an Arts and Humanities Research Council. The British Academy and HEFCE achieved Heads of Agreement for doing that in 1998. Among these was the plan that the new AHRC would take over ‘administration of the schemes of postgraduate studentships in the humanities and of postgraduate awards in certain professional and vocational areas’. Adjustments about funding were needed until the AHRC could come fully into being.<sup>4</sup> The BA’s Humanities Research Board was amalgamated with it.

When the *Higher Education and Research Act* of 2017 separated research from teaching, placing them in different Departments of State, the Research Councils moved into UKRI. Under this arrangement the AHRC receives conspicuously less Government funding through UKRI than the other Research Councils, about £70m a year against hundreds of £millions for the others, with the EPSRC allocated £647m for 2003-4.<sup>5</sup>

In the Commons on 18 March 2003 Tim Boswell, pleased at the imminent inception of the AHRC, contrasted ‘big research teams, which need a lot of kit and high capital investment’ with the position ‘in the humanities’. There were, he said, still ‘lonely scholars in garrets who are thinking important thoughts about philosophy, history or whatever, perhaps without a lot of support’.<sup>6</sup>

For many years (not ‘lonely’ but ‘lone’) I enjoyed the security of a Cambridge University Office which formally required of me a minimum of only thirty lectures a year<sup>7</sup> and left me free to think any thoughts I choose (whether ‘important’ or not) and to publish as I fancied. There was even a term free of duties after each period of six terms. Are academic researchers still able to enjoy such freedom to carry out ‘lone’ research on topics of their choosing?

Commonly it has been researchers in the humanities who have worked as individuals, needing little more than time in a library. The range of disciplines included among ‘arts and humanities’ continues to prove quite stretchy. In 2023 a HEPI *Report* asked ‘what’s going on’, offering its own definition:

*‘The Humanities includes for us everything from Philosophy, History and Theology, through English and Modern Languages, to Digital Humanities, Film Theory and Culture and Media Studies.’*

The Report itself excluded ‘practice-based arts disciplines’, arguing that ‘there is a different but equally important story to be told about their place and trajectory within the UK’.<sup>8</sup> The British Academy now says it seeks to ‘bring together scholars, government, business and civil society to influence policy for the benefit of everyone’. It includes ‘social sciences’ among the disciplines it

supports. The AHRC’s Research Funding Guide, pp.67-74, now lists a extensive remit<sup>9</sup> with a link to what to do in the case of research spanning disciplines which fall under different Research Councils.<sup>10</sup>

In an important respect the introduction of an institutional research agenda and a command structure in departments may now stand in the way of the solo researcher. Congregation put up a fight in 2005 in indignation when ‘letters’ were sent to academics seeking to require compliance with departmental research policy on pain of dismissal. When appraisal was first introduced at the end of the 1980s one’s choice of research topic was firmly regarded by Cambridge as on no account to be enquired about. However appraisal of Cambridge’s academic staff now seeks ‘information on current research projects, specific area of involvement, details of existing funding arrangements, lists of any publications over the past 4 years and those currently in progress’.<sup>11</sup>

## *The plight of the ‘lone researcher’*

‘Casualisation’ is threatening personal freedom of inquiry for academics in every category. Short-term contract researchers are not free to choose independent inquiry. They have their salaries paid by a grant which has been awarded for a particular piece of research, to a Principal Investigator who forms a team. There has been the general trend away from long-term teaching-and-research contracts which allow academics to divide their time between teaching and research and pursue an independent inquiry wherever it happens to lead. Here too the fixed-term contract has become more usual, limiting the long period of security which makes that possible.<sup>12</sup>

Humanities researchers typically publish single-author books rather than articles. A book may take several years to complete and longer still to see the light in published form. The impact of a book may become clear only over time, through reviews and mentions in footnotes. There are many examples of the lone humanities researcher producing a single but immensely important book after decades of work.

It is a fair question whether so much liberty may be wasteful of a researcher’s salary if regular impactful ‘results’ cannot be pointed to, but even those fortunate in their employment terms need time to produce outcomes. Every doctoral student in the humanities discovers that the question first addressed changes with more knowledge and may become a quite different question.

## *Finance*

Grants from most of the Research Councils to a Principal Investigator expect to fund facilities and the sala-

ries of a research team employed on the project. The lone scholar in the humanities usually requires no expensive 'kit' and no such 'team'.

The British Academy formerly offered some personal grants for small project funding. That allowed me to complete a *Concordance* to the writings of Anselm of Canterbury<sup>13</sup> by paying for someone to do the typing necessary to prepare the text for sorting. Solitary researchers were also until recently well served by the British Academy with generous Research Readerships paying the recipients' salaries to their employing universities for two years to allow them time for a major piece of work.<sup>14</sup> One of those bought me even more time for research than the University regularly provided me with as a University Officer. For researchers at the 'early-career' stage the British Academy still offers Fellowships jointly with Wolfson (for holders of academic posts covering the period of the Fellowship) and also Mid-Career Fellowships, conditional on the holders having posts at UK institutions of higher education. These are loose counterparts of the Royal Society's Career Development Fellowships.<sup>15</sup>

However such supportive funding placed a heavy financial load on the British Academy. In a paper of 1998, *Establishing the Arts and Humanities Research Board*,<sup>16</sup> it pointed out that when Research Councils began to be multiplied from the 1960s, Governments had taken the view that the British Academy could do that 'work' itself. It had done so, 'offering research grants and posts, and from 1984 administering postgraduate studentships for the Department of Education and Science'. Disappointed in that hope the Academy had set up its own Humanities Research Board.<sup>17</sup>

#### *The push towards group and collaborative work in AHRC and the REF*

The AHRC now expects a researcher to be a 'team player'. It says it wants 'to ensure that studentships do not occur in isolated silos' so it looked for 'cohorts', in which its studentships will be 'well integrated into the local research and innovation ecosystem, as well as into wider academia, as we encourage publicly funded PhDs to have wider public purpose'. It will 'empower higher education institutions with these studentships and enable local widening participation strategies, as well as incentivising regional ownership and support of cohorts through hubs for AHRC arts and humanities students'. Detail is still wanting. It will 'announce more on this in the new year'.

However the AHRC 'doctoral focal awards' seem to point in this direction. They are intended 'collectively' to 'constitute our way to facilitate sectoral or thematic deep dives and fill evidence-based gaps'. 'Collaboration and partnership, across a diverse range of partners', is to be 'key to the success of these awards'. Financial 'match funding' will be 'welcome':

*'We see both the focal and doctoral landscape awards, alongside our ongoing commitment to Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships we funded earlier this year, as a balanced portfolio approach to support the entire arts and humanities research ecosystem.'*

The AHRC aligns itself with 'upcoming' UKRI 'doctoral funding opportunities' in 'refreshed focus on high

collaboration, increased inclusion and a challenge-led approach'. This seems potentially unwelcoming to the would-be solitary researcher, since applicants to its funding opportunities 'will need to explicitly address how they will support inclusion and diversity through an action plan which will be assessed'.

Currently the AHRC's 'standard research grants', with a maximum award of £1.5 million (Full Economic Cost), for projects of up to five years, 'support collaborative research projects that require leadership from more than one researcher' and there must be 'at least one project co-lead jointly involved in the development and management of the project and co-authored research outputs.'

This fits with the current Research Excellence Framework expectation that a researcher will be part of a 'research community', with REF 'weightings' moving 'further away from the assessment of individuals'. That is to be replaced by 'a new approach to determining research volume' for a higher education provider, based on 'the average number of staff over a number of years'. This is clearly a good idea insofar as it creates an expectation that providers of higher education will be research-active, and perhaps encourage the multiplying 'alternative providers' in that direction, in hopes of their eventually even being allowed to grant research degrees.

The stated intention is that in this way the REF will be able to include more beginners, 'researchers establishing themselves, or moving into academia'.<sup>18</sup> The AHRC has held a consultation whose respondents asked it 'to ensure that arts and humanities doctoral training is impactful, diverse and inclusive', with an objective to 'support outstanding early career researchers from any background'. It sees itself as 'a strategic funder in doctoral training' with 'responsibilities in supporting equitable opportunities for all early career researchers'.

Doctoral studentships offered by the Research Councils are being reduced in number. The AHRC has recently been offering them to five 'cohorts' through ten collaborative Doctoral Training Partnerships, with the most recent students in receipt of these due to begin in October 2023. 'Open-Oxford-Cambridge'<sup>19</sup> is the Partnership within which Oxford offers its doctoral studentships. It lists a series of Collaborative Doctoral Awards where the researcher is in a group, not working alone.<sup>20</sup> It encourages students to seek 'placements' in which they will work in 'an external organisation on a mutually beneficial project', seen as 'a fantastic professional development opportunity' enhancing 'future employment prospects'.<sup>21</sup>

#### *The AHRC begins to reward social and economic impact*

In UKRI's account of its own general purposes the social and economic benefits which have become a prominent feature of English higher education policy are put first:

*'We invest in research and innovation to enrich lives, drive economic growth, and create jobs and high-quality public services across the UK. We are transforming tomorrow together.'*<sup>22</sup>

The AHRC defines similar social and economic expectations:

*'To be the lead applicant, you must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for AHRC funding with capacity in the arts*

and humanities for creative economy or for a healthy planet, people, and place.<sup>23</sup>

Here is a trend embedded in Government policy regarding academic researchers as a potential ‘workforce’ or initiators of ‘start-ups.’<sup>24</sup> UKRI echoes that idea in its talk of a ‘postgraduate talent pipeline’:

*‘Our intention with the focal awards is to address known and anticipated research skills gaps and shortages and facilitate employability of doctoral graduates.’*

The arts and humanities ‘talent pipeline’ is seen as having social as well as economic value:

*‘We must invest in the arts and humanities postgraduate talent pipeline to enable the kind of research leadership that is uniquely placed to deliver research and innovation for the good of society.’<sup>25</sup>*

Research England’s<sup>26</sup> Executive Chair Jessica Corner contributed a blog to *WonkHE* in September in which, using terminology of a ‘workforce’ she argued that ‘skilled people’ must be ‘at the heart of a thriving research system’ but again in terms of their forming a ‘workforce’<sup>27</sup>. The Government’s *R&D People and Culture Strategy*, she said, meant that there was a:

*‘need to work across the sector to identify where there are skills gaps, anticipate future needs, and ensure we have the workforce to match the UK’s R&D ambitions.’<sup>28</sup>*

On the REF there is an ‘update’ on recent thinking about all this, but mainly consisting of dates when conclusions may be expected in Spring 2024, and an extension of the proposed timetable for the next REF.<sup>29</sup>

The AHRC publishes a *Blog* about its activities,<sup>30</sup> showing active effort to keep up with emerging needs, for example ‘AI and the Arts’. It currently has ‘five major Discovery Projects’, and is working on recommendations ‘for the future of digital cultural heritage collections’, topical in view of recent Government proposals to destroy paper wills once their contents have been made digital. The lone researcher may play a part in all this, but perhaps not as easily as a ‘team player’.

## Conclusion

Where does this leave the lone academic researcher beginning a career now? He or she will not easily benefit from the restoration of UK participation in *Horizon*, pump-priming grants. ‘With the support of the Royal Society, the Academy of Medical Sciences, and the Royal Academy of Engineering are inviting proposals from UK and EU/Associated Countries-based researchers to pump prime collaborations to support the effective uptake of the opportunities provided by the UK’s association to Horizon Europe. Proposals are welcome in all disciplines – engineering, natural sciences, medical and health sciences, humanities, and social sciences.’ The lone academic researcher in the humanities is going to look small in that landscape.

The *Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers*<sup>31</sup> updated in 2019, tends to assume that a re-

searcher will have a ‘manager’ supervising an approved project, not launching out alone on an enquiry of personal interest. Oxford has made serious efforts to tackle the problem of research career opportunities for researchers through its ‘Career Development Reviews’.<sup>32</sup> Cambridge too has signed the *Concordat* and offers some guidance for fixed-term researchers.<sup>33</sup> But neither could assert with confidence that this promises a future for the lone academic researcher.

<sup>1</sup> Now the BBSRC, ESRC, EPSRC, MRC, NERC, STFC.

<sup>2</sup> *Higher Education Act*, 2004, ss.1-10.

<sup>3</sup> *Higher Education in the Learning Society*, <https://education-uk.org/documents/dearing1997/dearing1997.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/341/BAR34-21-Archive-AHRB.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beis-research-and-development-rd-partner-organisation-allocation-2022-to-2025/beis-research-and-development-uk-research-and-innovation-allocation-2022-2023-to-2024-2025#:~:text=to%2D2024%2D2025-,Introduction,%2D2023%20to%202024%2D2025.>

<sup>6</sup> House of Commons Debate 18 March 2003

<sup>7</sup> *Statutes and Ordinances*, Special Ordinance C (ix), 5.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/The-Humanities-in-the-UK-Today-Whats-Going-On.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/AHRC-240723-ResearchFundingGuide.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/how-to-apply/preparing-to-make-a-funding-application/if-your-research-spans-different-disciplines/>

<sup>11</sup> This might include information on current research projects, specific area of involvement, details of existing funding arrangements, lists of any publications over the past 4 years and those currently in progress.

<sup>12</sup> <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/research-scientist>

<sup>13</sup> *A Concordance to the Works of St. Anselm*, ed. G.R.Evans (Kraus, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> The university was then able to appoint a temporary replacement, giving someone else a useful start in an academic career.

<sup>15</sup> <https://royalsociety.org/grants-schemes-awards/grants/career-development-fellowship/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/341/BAR34-21-Archive-AHRB.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Absorbed into the AHRC under the *Higher Education Act* of 2004.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/future-research-assessment-programme/initial-decisions>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.oocdtp.ac.uk/home>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.oocdtp.ac.uk/cdas-2024-25>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.oocdtp.ac.uk/placements>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/apply-for-a-doctoral-focal-award-in-the-arts-and-humanities/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/venture-science-doctorate-reorients-phds-towards-start-ups>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/>

<sup>26</sup> Taking over HEFCE's allocation of public funding for research.

<sup>27</sup> <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/its-time-to-talk-about-research-culture-and-the-ref/>

<sup>28</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f804228fa8f50c-768387c5/r\\_d-people-culture-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f804228fa8f50c-768387c5/r_d-people-culture-strategy.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ref.ac.uk/news/update-on-initial-decisions/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/blog/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/researcher-hub/career-development-reviews-fixed-term-researchers>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.postdocacademy.cam.ac.uk/researcher-development-concordat>

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# Pavilion

i

According to Morelli, an Old Master  
Would unconsciously paint  
The same ear in all of his work.  
Though nature provides various  
Pavilions and lobes, those  
Of his model were seldom thought of —

A butterfly contracting her body  
Pushing air under large light  
Aerodynamic wings turning  
In their figure of eight, eyes  
Yearning in a sign of infinity —  
All too low for the human ear

At a frequency of eight hertz,  
Too low for the pavilion to capture  
Her sound waves to pass into  
The auditory canal and receive  
From the brain an eyelash flutter.  
Weak readings betray a keen listening

Pavilion losing the faith of her saints:  
Augustine speechless by an open book,  
Amazed as Ambrose takes it in  
Using only the eyes and the mind,  
His lips unmoved, and his voice  
Thrown into the keep of the tongue.

Though she has the ear of many,  
Passing on whatever comes her way,  
Pavilion is herself unheard,  
Unsung and longing to capture  
Church acoustics for that eloquent man  
To rouse the sleep of echoes.

ii

According to Mancini, a physician  
Known for lightning diagnoses  
The signature of a master's hand  
Is found where brushwork is swift,  
Where light on silk, a wave of hair  
Depend on the artist's fantasy

And an even temper, a candle  
Holding its nerve, calming its shadows.  
In an old master's hand paint creates  
Its absence, so a woman draws us  
In from our time into her pavilion.  
She bids us speak and lends an ear.

She picks up the rhythm of our speech,  
Attuned to greater hurts, their frequency  
Unrecorded in her; a whisper's  
Sibilants dissolve in a breath  
Until you yourself bargain with her:  
She will pick up the beat for life

If she confirms that this man with them  
Will live, or else she returns to paint,  
To thoughtless strokes of a beautiful ear.  
The bargain is struck: just for her,  
Through the stethoscope of us a heart  
Flutters, quickening to save from freezing

Such extremities: a bodyguard's  
Photos of the fingers toes and ears  
Of his diplomat, would fail to capture  
The man without the muscle-memory  
Of the diplomat's wife, her hand  
On the prints read  
silently.

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# Spirit Animals

## Balloon

The youngest spirit? A balloon on a string  
In every child's hand led through the alphabet.  
By the time they reach V they'll know  
All the letters they'll need for *adventure*.  
Strings released, Jon, Sofia and Angelina  
The first to let go are skeining into geese.

## Peacock

Hera placed eyes on feathers to herald  
The coming of wisdom, and now sisters  
Fallen short of their full span are raised  
By a peacock brother's train-rattling tail  
To witness in the flicker of an eyelash  
A lightness of being that can be borne.

## Turtle

I run down the beach to the sea and stay  
In my leatherback shell, a submariner  
Summoned by water for a young voyager  
To set sail if I can weigh the anchor.  
May her name forever make landfall,  
Her life underwritten in my wake.

## Spider

In her downtime a brooch in a serial  
Torsion spring of steel ribbon; on duty  
A nurse's fob watch, rewound in spider silk  
To bandage the wound in cobweb, vitamin K.  
She borrows from the spirit her reflected  
Body language, the time read upside down.

## Spirit Animal, 6.00 am

Three stars low in the grass, a dog's collar  
Moving through the unlit open ground.  
Above us the half-moon can't be brought to light.  
What keeps her here? I would call her if I knew  
Her name, nothing to hand but a mobile,  
No lead but a clear signal between them.

GREG SWEETNAM

Greg Sweetnam was one of the poets in Carcanet's 2004 *Oxford Poets Anthology*, and he has been widely published elsewhere. A retired graphic designer, he now works for Facilities Management.



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